

Double ,Double, Toil and Tribble

by Me

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Summary: Naomi gets a new pet tribble on a planet as Voyager recovers from pirate attacks. Little does she know it will multiply like crazy, as will the odd series of trades that get Voyager home. Written before the finale (wow, was it that long ago?)

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Naomi's "new pet" begets, among other things, an odd sequence of trades which gets Voyager home.

I'd been wanting to do a Voyager goes home story, but also had some thoughts about tribbles - so this is perhaps the most unique story ever told of Voyager going home.

"We are going to have to land," spoke Tuvok calmly as the ship stumbled through the atmosphere. He scanned the planet below. "Luckily, our landing mechanisms are still functioning."

"You hear that, B'Elanna, we're touching down," spoke Captain Kathryn Janeway into her command chair just before her world went black. Voyager had taken a tumble, and landed nose first. Injuries were numerous, but not terribly damaging, mostly scrapes, bumps, and contusions..

"The ship should be up and running in a few hours," reported Torres from Engineering.

As the Holodoc repaired the wounded and activated numerous copies of himself to assist, Naomi Wildman wandered out onto the surface. She was unhurt, as the girl had been in the holodeck at the time. The holodeck computer mistakenly read the crash as something happening in the holodeck and activated the safety protocols to protect her - yet another holodeck malfunction, but this had helped to prevent injury.

The school-aged girl meandered around the planet for a little while before a man came stomping through the bushes. She jumped slightly. "Sorry to startle you," he told her.

The girl assured him it was okay, and then asked if he lived on the planet. "We didn't think we'd read any life forms earlier."

"Actually, I just landed a short time ago myself." He was pale blue, with cheeks that looked as though they could be pouches for marsupials.

"Who are you." she asked.

"The name is Rowlie Zerfendorf, I found an old ship - odd looking thing, to say the least - with a large group of these little furry creatures on board." He showed her one of the balls. "I at first thought they were something inanimate until I picked one up and it purred." He paused a second and looked to his left - he could see Voyager near the horizon. "That your ship?"

"Yes, we crashed, but we're getting fixed up pretty well," stated Naomi. "Our crew is looking for Earth, you've probably never heard of it. It's..." She thought a moment, then spoke resignedly with a slight grin. "Well, it's a REALLY long story."

"I'm afraid I've never been there," explained the newcomer, "but some of the traders I'm familiar with go to the outer edge of the Scorpio II trading route..." He sensed that his long story would likely match Naomi's, so he merely stated "well, I've heard of Earth. I'll give you the co-ordinates if you need."

"We have those. Are there any wormholes near here," she wondered, unsure how these traders operated. Her presumption was that this man was much like Neelix in his line of work.

"I don't have that kind of technology to find them, but I know someone who might, if you want to ask your captain." She had been eying the creatures longingly. "Tell you what, since you're such a nice little girl, I'll give you this." He handed her a furry, not quite round ball. It purred contentedly as she took it.

Naomi grinned broadly. She'd never seen a being like it. "Thank you, what is it?"

"I don't know. I was looking for an uninhabited planet to put them on; I think this would be ideal."

"Oh, I'm sure it will be!" She ran off, delighted, as the crew of Voyager was finishing up their repairs. "Look, Seven," she hollered as she ran past her mother, busily fixing several parts of the ship's exterior and shielding. She wished the ship didn't lose so many shuttles, for it meant her mom was constantly at work.

"What is it?" The creature stopped purring and made a noise akin to a shudder as Seven took it. She quickly gave it back to the girl. "Obviously, a species more fit to be considered a pet' rather than one which would provide advances worthy of note in the arts, sciences, or elsewhere."

"Whatever," Naomi remarked as she stroked it gently. It helped her feel much calmer, easing the mixed feelings she sometimes had; after all, the ship was her home, not some planet named Earth that they were trying to find. She took it into her quarters, then decided to visit Captain Janeway in Sickbay. "Captain, there was a man out there in another ship, he says he might know someone with a wormhole finding device. Oh, and...we need to get some food for my new pet I got from him, too."

The captain didn't really care what kind of pet it was at this point; she would use this man's knowledge if it would help them get to Earth. Besides, it was only one, and being concerned with it was secondary to concern over getting her ship off the ground and past the Lodelian Pirates which had attacked them. "Well, good, I'll go out..."

"Not now, Captain, you are supposed to rest," spoke the holodoc. "Perhaps an away team would be appropriate. Commander Chakotay is healthy enough."

"Good, Naomi, find Chakotay and tell him to assemble an away team to find this man." She did so.

Chakotay and Paris beamed over near where the man had stood. "Luckily the transporters are working well," noted Paris, as he examined the surroundings.

Walking up to the man, Chakotay introduced himself and Paris. "Our captain was injured in the crash - not badly, but enough so that she couldn't come. However, we understand that you may know someone who may have a wormhole finding device?"

"I am not certain," spoke Rowlie, "but I know where they might be." He paused a second. "I am hesitant to show you, however, I must leave rather quickly. I am to meet the daughter of the President of Rigel VII soon, we are having our wedding in a couple of weeks."

"Congratulations," spoke both Federation officers.

"Thank you. I merely took a detour because we did not want these creatures harmed," he explained, pointing to the large collection of tribbles behind him.

"Tribbles," muttered Paris.

"Is that what they are called - I wasn't sure."

Chakotay explained that they were one of the more favorite planetside pets in the Federation - as long as the person was ensured by a licensed rancher that there was only one and it was not pregnant. "Otherwise, they multiply like crazy."

"Someone must have been tired of them. I found them on board this very old ship, maybe close to a hundred years old." He described its markings.

Paris hummed. "The Klingons used a ship like that at one point, but it's been out of service for so long..."

Chakotay snapped his fingers. "Remember the story about Captain Scott beaming all those tribbles over to a Klingon ship?" Paris vaguely recalled. Rowlie was intrigued, wishing he had more time to learn of this instance to which Chakotay referred. "I bet they put them all on an old scow and just sent it flying out this way on manual."

"And after what, eighty years, it get about 25,000 light years out," remarked Paris.

Rowlie wished he could stay and chat. "However, I do need to get going."

"Better be careful, we were downed a few hours ago by some Lodelian Pirates," explained Chakotay.

"Oh, dear, they'll probably be watching this area." He wondered if Voyager could get him past them. "I was lucky, they were probably getting drunk over their success at downing you and not paying attention to me."

"Sure, I'm sure the captain wouldn't mind having you on board," Paris remarked.

Chakotay explained "they caught us off guard, they have some odd cloak technology, but we'll be ready this time."

"Good, then you can just store my ship in your shuttle bay if you need." With that, the three of them left for Voyager, with Chakotay making a note to prepare a tractor beam for Rowlie's ship.

Once they had gotten back on board, Chakotay reported to Sickbay. Tom and B'Elanna were also present. "We'll have a guest for a while, it'll be best to get him where he needs to be quickly; he's getting married soon."

"That's nice; please extend our congratulations." As Janeway said this, B'Elanna glanced inquisitively at Tom, as if to ask if he might be thinking about the same thing. He grinned back, but didn't catch the query the look implied.

Chakotay explained he'd already congratulated him. "I've done that - he'd come to drop off a bunch of tribbles he'd found in an old Klingon garbage scow. They'd apparently been placed in stasis - some sort of cryogenic field - until they were discovered."

"Chakotay thinks those are the tribbles the original Enterprise beamed over to the Klingons," explained Paris.

Janeway's mind was only partly on the Enterprise. "Wait...Naomi got a pet just now, didn't she?" She didn't know if she dared to ask, but felt she'd better. "Find her and bring her here, I want to ask about this pet that she got from him." The officers did so, then left to man their stations as the ship took off from the world.

As Voyager sailed low in the sky while scanning for signs of the pirates, Naomi came to see Captain Janeway. "What is it, Captain?"

"I want to find out a little more about that new pet of yours," spoke

Janeway in a curious, yet firm, manner.

The girl wasn't sure what she wanted to know. "Well, it's kind of egg-shaped - no, rounder than that, and has a fur like substance that's a strange texture. It makes me feel very content. And, it purrs a lot - except it kind of shuddered when Seven held it," noted the girl, somewhat puzzled.

Looking slightly exasperated, Janeway sighed. "Just what we need - troubles with tribbles." Noticing the girl's confused expression, the captain stared at Naomi and asked "do you realize how fast those things multiply?"

"It was only one tribble, I promise," explained the girl.

The holodoc walked over, put an arm on Naomi's shoulder, and spoke candidly. "My dear, it is about time you learned the facts of life. And one of the most important of these is, there is no such thing as one tribble. Their number will keep growing and growing, even if you think it not possible," finished the Doctor.

"Go and bring your tribble," Janeway commanded, "and let's make sure it's not pregnant."

Naomi complied, as Ensign Kim walked over to the captain. He had just been cleared to return to active duty. Snickering a little, he inquired if she'd ever read James Kirk's logs. She had studied them quite a bit. "I guess he had some...interesting experiences with tribbles."

"Yes, let's just hope that this situation doesn't get out of hand. As it is we're going to have to keep B'Elanna away, I'm afraid."

Kim nodded slowly. "After reading his logs quite often before coming on board, somehow, I have this feeling of deja vu all over again."

"That's redundant," noted the doctor.

"No, actually, my girlfriend had something very similar happen to her when she allowed her pet tribbles to get into some leftover Thalonian pot roast," the ensign explained. Janeway made a note to ensure Neelix promptly dispose of any foods with similar ingredients.

Naomi, meanwhile, walked with Tuvok to her quarters. The Vulcan security chief was noting that "Vulcans actually are soothed by tribbles as well - they have something in them which provides comforting stimuli to almost everyone in the galaxy - except Klingons." They opened the door to Naomi's quarters, and the girl gasped. Tuvok merely raised his eyebrows. "You said you were given how many tribbles?"

"Just one," she replied, aghast.

"Obviously, a very pregnant one." He walked over to pick one of them up. "Fascinating. It appears to have been born almost fully grown. Unless it has been eating something quite conducive to growth. Did you have any food in here?"

"Just some leftover Thalonian pot roast." She considered the cute creatures, and grabbed them up to try and fit them all in her arms. Tuvok assisted after several kept insisting on dropping out. "Maybe they're all girls."

"The only way to tell is to see if they mate or not," explained Tuvok.

The door opened quickly, and Neelix cried out "the captain says get rid of all Thalonian pot roast; I checked the list and you had some last night. Where is it?"

Tuvok indicated the creatures in Naomi's arms. "You are too late, if my presumption as to the nature of the captain's concern is correct. These tribbles have apparently consumed the pot roast."

He stared blankly. "Oh." Neelix took one of them and grinned. "I've never seen anything like it before." It purred happily.

"It is a creature from the Alpha Quadrant, which multiplies at a frenetic pace. It is best advised that we ensure that these stay away from each other, and that they have not also bred while Naomi was away as soon as possible." Though that might be too late, he deduced, they might already have mated.

"Yeah, before this ship goes from being crippled to being tribbled in one day." He snickered and grinned at Tuvok.

Naomi carried three tribbles into Astrometrics. "Hello, Seven, how are you?"

"I am performing as well as can be expected under the circumstances." Seven seemed almost to ignore the girl as she continued her work, attempting to calculate the best way to read the Lodelian warp signature. "These pirates are quite annoying." She glanced at the tribbles. "I thought you only had one of those."

"It was very pregnant," Naomi spoke, repeated Tuvok's phrase. "We think these are all the same gender, so we're keeping them here. But try to keep them separate just in case; there's really no way to tell."

Seven walked over to another computer. "I do not believe I shall have time to monitor your new pets." She programmed something into a PADD, then walked to the computer screen to which she'd connected it.

"Come on, you'll have fun." Naomi could tell Seven was concerned about something, so she picked up a tribble and handed it to Seven. "Here, a tribble for your thoughts."

Seven looked askance at the creature. "An odd form of trade...but then again, an odd item to pay for."

"Why don't you like them?"

"Pets are irrelevant." She programmed some more items into the PADD.

"They can provide you with great pleasure, you know. Here, take it."

"If I do, will you expect my thoughts in return." The girl shrugged. Seven took the tribble and studied it very carefully. "It is an intriguing specimen - it contains no visible eyes, feet, mouth, or external..." She cleared her throat, recalling Naomi was there. "But you say you cannot tell if they are male or female?" She put it down.

"We don't know for sure. The captain ordered them placed around the ship, so they can't mate. Except we have to keep them away from B'Elanna."

"Very well, I shall endeavor to do that. Now run along, I am quite busy." Naomi left, but just as she stepped into the turbolift, she turned around and glanced at Seven. She had once more picked up the tribble to study it before setting it down again.

Janeway shook her head as she ambled to the bridge early the next morning, the ship having been able to sneak past the pirates quietly during the night. She noted a tribble in her command chair. "Look's like I've been replaced," she joked lightly.

Ensign Kim explained. "That was left over from the night shift. Naomi'd brought some of the tribbles up here to keep them separated, and a few had mated already. Excuse me, a few of the ones who had been delivered by the offspring of her first one had mated already."

Shaking her head as she placed the tribble beside her chair, she murmured "so they're in their fourth generation already."

"Better make sure none of them get near B'Elanna," Paris remarked.

Janeway shifted in her chair. "I'm well aware of Captain's Kirk's encounters with tribbles, just get us out of here. And let's hope that we can get Rowlie to the chapel on time."

Near the end of the day, Voyager found itself in standard orbit around the home of Rowlie's fiancée. "I wish we could stay for the wedding," remarked Janeway in her dress uniform as she and Chakotay prepared to beam down with Rowlie to the President's palace. After they transported down, Chakotay handed a small package to Rowlie. "My First Officer has a little gift from the crew of Voyager for the couple, he'll place it somewhere where you can open it after the wedding."

Rowlie apologized for the trouble. However, "if you wish to leave a gift, you may need to go some ways out of your way again, I'm afraid."

"We're used to that, we want to find Earth but exploring has always been part of the Federation's mission," she assured him as the planet's President appeared and introduced himself.

"So good of you to extend your congratulations," remarked the man, who looked much like a human except he had three eyes and eight fingers on each hand. Chakotay barely resisted a comment about how the people of that world might play the piano. "It is actually

customary with our people that gifts be taken to the honeymoon place, where the couple engages in a treasure hunt - it is symbolic of their search for continued love and riches in family, a search which shall be ongoing as they grow together."

"What a lovely concept," spoke the captain.

"If you would please take your gift to the moon of Epsilon Beta IV, that is where they will spend it." He also explained that "our planet is going through a major drought, and it is causing some headaches for us, as we are very busy trying to get food to the right places. Actually, if you would be so kind, they have already written down the clues as to where to find their gifts, it would be quite helpful if you would take them as well, and hide them where they request."

"Certainly one of the most unique things we've done, but the Federation is always glad to be of assistance." She explained their existence so far from home, and invited the President to put in an application to join when the Federation reached out that way. He remarked that he would strongly consider it. "Your future son-in-law mentioned something about a people which may have a wormhole finding device."

Hurriedly, he said "yes, that would be the Gogolians. Unfortunately, I do not have time..."

"We could give you some replicator technology, if you join; we share our advanced technology with all our members," Chakotay offered. "You can create your own food."

"That would be wonderful, though we would still need to get it to the right places." Janeway offered to provide diagrams of how to build a replicator in exchange for information on the Gogolians. The offer accepted, Voyager was soon on its way.

The captain and crew tried not to get their hopes up as they placed the items for the honeymoon treasure hunt on the moon requested. However, they were still eager to speak with a member of the Gogolian race, and even more anxious to get rid of some of their tribbles. The number was near a thousand, and Naomi could hardly tell which was her original. As Torres and Chakotay placed the items, Janeway asked Tuvok to open hailing frequencies with the planet below.

A person with a very square head answered. As Janeway tried to explain their purpose and requested permission to drop off the tribbles, the person replied. "We've just gotten over a war with another star system, we're a little too ravaged to really be of help for newcomers." He remarked that there was, however, a Gogolian who was helping to mediate the dispute. "You can talk to him now, save you some time finding his world."

"That would be wonderful, thank you." Janeway was soon speaking with a fellow who looked human except for a three foot tall mass of purple goo that they assumed was hair. "How do you do, I'm Captain Kathryn Janeway, of the USS Voyager. We're trying to locate Earth, and were told by a Rowlie Zerfendorf that your people might have a wormhole finding device."

"Yes, we do have one which may assist in your endeavor. I will give



it to you on one condition."

"What might that be?"

"I must take a communique to another planet. President Xblker has told you of the war?" He had. "I am taking the negotiated settlement to the Blorpa home world for consideration. It would save valuable days if you could get me there, so I don't have to call for a ship from my world. I was left here because I expected the negotiations would take quite a while, which they have, and I didn't want one waiting for me."

"We understand. Where is this world?" After hearing the location, she sighed inwardly, knowing it was still another day out of their way, but agreed. "We love to promote the idea of peace. We'll beam you aboard." They quickly zoomed off after the others had done their work on the moon.

Janeway met the visitor in the transporter room, and they walked toward special guest quarters as they chatted, with tribbles lining the halls at various points. "This is something the Federation will often do, is transport ambassadors," she was explaining to him."

"That is wonderful, your Federation sounds like what our former leader dreamed of several decades back. Sadly, we were not able to put it together. We still like to play peacemaker for others, though."

Janeway smiled. They were passing Astrometrics, and the captain invited the ambassador in to gaze at the stars for a few moments. "It's really neat to look out there and consider all that unexplored space."

"Yes, it is. It's a shame people cannot learn to get along." Janeway agreed. Even on Earth there were sometimes disputes, though no wars for a long time. "I will tell you how to get to Gogol, and you can simply tell them I sent you."

"Fair enough. Rowlie sure picked an odd place for a honeymoon, if a war was going on with the planet."

"The moons are off limits in battle. It is very sad," explained the man, "but they will sit for days and negotiate how the war is to be fought once they determine peace is not an alternative. And yet they would not give peace another chance."

"In ancient Earth sometimes civilians could safely go and watch battles. Then it got more crowded and civilians were getting hurt more and more, and finally those old rules just disappeared. Finally, we could wipe out all life with a few bombs." She paused, considering the hundreds of millions lost in their world wars. It was almost better to be a tribble-like species when it came to that part of the equation. How long would it take the people of these planets to learn to get along, and what would the price be? She hoped the Federation could make it out this to assist in keeping the peace. She informed the ambassador that she hoped someday, the Federation would be able to invite them to become a member. He looked forward to that time.

Once that mission was complete, Voyager traveled to Gogol, and Torres, Seven, and Tuvok beamed down to inquire into getting the device.

As they were being instructed in how to use it, Chakotay carried half a dozen tribbles with him to Sickbay. "So these are the objects of derision I have heard so much about the last few days," came the doctor.

"Yeah, I'll say. They've already begun multiplying at a ridiculous pace," explained Chakotay. "We must have thousands on board."

The Doctor could have searched his database, but chose to make small talk and inquire of the commander. "Where do they come from?"

"Everywhere. You've got to find a way to fix' these creatures."

The doctor shook his head. "But I'm a people doctor, not a veterinarian."

The commander sighed. "Look, there must be something in your memory banks about how to keep such a species from having babies - or at least a similar species."

The holodoc thought for a second. "I am afraid not. Even experienced raisers of them have great trouble discerning tribble gender, and what little they can do to stop them isn't in my memory banks.. We are not the only ones to encounter problems with tribbles, Commander Chakotay," emphasized the hologram before gazing grimly, straight into the man's eyes and speaking in a foreboding tone. "Many attempts have been made by non-raisers to prevent tribbles from breeding. None has succeeded."

Chakotay shoved the creatures into the doctor's arms. "Well, try, for goodness sake. They're everywhere," he proclaimed.

Sighing, the holodoc muttered "I'll see what I can do" as Chakotay left.

The senior staff met in the briefing room, along with 7 of 9. Seven reported "I have recalculated the coordinates based on the diversions we have been taking. We have not gone too far out of our way, but it will be a couple of weeks longer."

"Thank you," came Janeway as she inquired into habitable planets nearby. "I almost left our friends' on that moon, but I didn't want to spoil the couple's honeymoon by having them buried up to their necks in tribbles."

"Who knows," Paris considered aloud, "maybe they'd consider it a sign of a large family. Maybe if we get married, B'Elanna, we can have some tribbles on our honeymoon. Seeing Rowlie and talking with him has made me think."

"If you're thinking about those creatures, it's made you insane, too," came B'Elanna's frustrated voice.

Tom smiled pleasantly at B'Elanna. "Hey, I know it's hard, but remember those TV shows from old Earth I watch? All you're doing is

filling the stereotypical role of a woman scared by a mouse."

Amidst giggles from Paris and Chakotay,, Torres responded "I am not!" As Paris' giggles grew louder, she tried to defend herself. "Okay, so I was a little frightened when one got into engineering."

"A little," wondered Paris.

"Well, you didn't see me standing on a chair and shrieking eek, a tribble!' did you?"

"It was close," Paris noted.

Seven interrupted. "I believe your exact words were get that creature away from me NOW!'"

"It was a good five meters away from you," came Paris, grinning to the others as if to say he'd made his point.

"Well, I wasn't standing on a chair, was I," Torres tried to retaliate. She merely shook her head as Paris continued to giggle.

Janeway knew her embattled officers - especially Torres - needed a chance to let off a little steam, as their extra cargo had combined with the thoughts of maybe getting him to make them anxious. However, she interceded to soothe her chief engineer's nerves. "It's all right, we're going to continue to make a concerted effort to keep them away from you. I'm sorry we happened to miss that one."

"If it gets any worse I'll have to sleep in Engineering."

Tuvok tried to bring the matter back to the situation at hand. "Even were every crewmember to get one and endeavor to keep it in his or her room, they have shown an amazing proclivity to escape. A containment field would not be practical, since there are so many, and we would not be able to block them from the air ducts."

"Maybe we should put one around B'Elanna," came Paris' joking comment.

The half Klingon nodded. "If this keeps up I might ask you to."

Tuvok continued. "One possibility is the Delta Flyer. Housing them there will be sufficient until we would get them to a nice planet."

Janeway added that "in the Delta Flyer they could get way too cramped after a while." To the looks of her officers she explained. "Come on, your captain's allowed to have a few pleasures, too. Besides, not only do I like them, but they are living, breathing creatures."

"What about one of the holodecks," Chakotay inquired.

"That would be a drain on our energy," Torres noted, "but would be made up for by the fact we wouldn't be replicating tribble food so much."

"Holo-generated food...can something survive on that," mused Janeway, partly to herself.

Tuvok ascertained "that is unknown, Captain. For short durations, people can be filled on holodeck food. However, it is really a hologram, unlike our own food, and therefore studies have shown that that may merely be psychological."

"Like a placebo," Tom remarked.

The captain decided that was best for now. "It's worth a try, for short durations, but I sure hope we find someplace for them to live soon. Or that we can somehow find a wormhole with our newest sensor. We've spotted one already a couple light years away, but it leads back the way we came." B'Elanna left to program a suitable environment for tribbles into the holodeck as a faint screeching noise could be heard. "What was that," came Janeway.

"It sounds as if there is a problem in the air duct," noted Tuvok. He stood on a chair to open it, with Seven nearby. Suddenly, several dozen tribbles all fell out and hit them in the head.

"I guess we already have some problems with overpopulation," remarked Chakotay.

"Quite," came Seven's absent remark as she stepped out of the pile of tribbles at her feet. She gazed down at them. "They are intriguing creatures."

The captain forced a smile. "Yes, they are. Have you held one, Seven?"

"Circumstances have prevented me from avoiding it." As she started to pick some of them up and place them in varying parts of the room, she expounded on the subject. "The Borg have never considered such species important. But they do have a certain..." She paused, examining the one she held. It struck her as most curious. She felt that that her natural curiosity was developing, as the love of learning for its own sake, rather than for assimilation, was something quite foreign to the Borg.

Tom grinned. "Yeah, a Borgified tribble. Now that would be a real sight!"

"Yes, it would." The tribble seemed more content than any she had picked up before, though she hadn't noticed it was her own steadily changing demeanor toward them which caused them to be more comfortable with her. "However, the Borg lack...curiosity."

"That's what's caused mankind to boldly explore all we have," noted Janeway.

"Yes, that is true. I wonder how one does tell these creatures apart. I have been trying to study them to see if I can tell, there are a couple possibilities, but I am unsure." She repeated what Naomi Wildman had suggested. "I do see that part as a unique challenge."

"It requires a very experienced raiser of them," explained Chakotay.

"I don't know myself, and even the doctor has problems."

"That's what's so bad about letting these things roam free," remarked Janeway as she and the others picked up more tribbles. "Without control they simply become overpopulated and a burden on themselves as well as us, eventually causing them to starve. Letting them be free of our interference is the worst thing we could do for such charming creatures," came the smiling captain as she gazed lovingly at the tribble, stroking it gently.

Janeway, Tuvok, and Seven ensured all the tribbles were secure in the conference room, and the others traveled toward the bridge. Suddenly, Ensign Kim called on Janeway's communicator pin. "We're receiving a distress call from about half a light year away, going to investigate," he noted.

"On our way." Janeway and the others quickly left. As she stepped onto the bridge, a fellow with a blue face and spikes sticking out of its head appeared on screen. "Greetings," she remarked, stepping over tribbles as the others found their seats, "I'm Captain Kathryn Janeway of the USS Voyager, from the United Federation of Planets. How may we be of assistance?"

"I am Zevek, I run a scout ship for the Morng star system, and we noticed your warp signature. We were hoping you could help us."

Janeway grinned slightly as she stood in front of her seat. "You need assistance with your warp engines?"

"Yes, we are a long way from home, and we encountered a near fatal breach. We also have another serious problem. I know we don't have much to offer..."

"The Federation normally doesn't get out this far, but we'll gladly assist you." Zevek's statement meant they clearly had warp technology.

"Well, we actually have another problem besides the warp engines..." He suddenly noticed Tuvok. The security officer had been standing, but now attempted to sit down. However, first he had to pluck three tribbles out of his seat. "Oh," cried Zevek with joy, "you have those, too!"

Janeway pointed at the creatures. "You mean the tribbles?"

Janeway tried to explain their predicament, but before she could, Zevek continued. "We do have something to offer you, then - you can take on our other problem while you help us with the engines."

Tom glanced at Chakotay at the helm. He spoke lowly. "He's offering to pay us for helping by giving us more problems?" Scratching his head, he stated "I think I'm missing something."

Picking up a tribble and handing it to Paris, Chakotay said "is this it?"

"Thanks," deadpanned Tom, as he placed the tribble in a pile of eight beside his chair.

Zevek continued to explain. "Even with the warp core aid, we would have no use for these creatures, as our species does not keep pets. We have kept them completely out of our bridge and engine room. We picked a few up to study them just out of curiosity, but they multiplied much faster than we anticipated, and we can no longer control their growth."

The captain was tempted to say "tell me about it," but merely nodded. "I understand Normally we wouldn't have this many, but our situation means doing things a little differently from the norm for the Federation." She explained that they had been sent 70,000 light years from home by a space anomaly and were still around 25,000 light years away. "We experimented with allowing children on all of our ships, for instance, and have now abandoned that idea for all but a few. Yet we have several on board ours." She wondered aloud if the Mornng possessed any sort of super warp capabilities, while ordering B'Elanna, Seven, and a team of engineers over to the Mornng ship to repair the engines and provide them with new warp core materials.

"No, I'm afraid we don't have anything to help you get back home." Zevek rubbed one of the spikes on his head, near his chin. "The Lovulians might...I think they do. But..." He ceased, pondering whether it might be possible.

"But what?"

"There may be some problem reaching them, we have not had any success lately, and we are unsure why." He didn't think it was an attack, but "we were hoping to somehow provide them with a new map and subroutines for our latest computer developments."

"We try not to interfere with societies which are pre-warp technology, we feel they should develop on their own," spoke the captain, "but if it's an emergency we would certainly try to help without making ourselves known." He remarked they had warp-drive capability. "Good, we'll see what we can do when we get there. Give my crewmembers the information you wish to transfer to the Lovulians."

"Good, and thank you for the assistance once again."

Janeway instructed Tuvok once the link was broken "go down to the transporter room to assist in transporting their tribbles to some good, secure storage places."

The Vulcan stared at her. "All of them, Captain?"

"Yes, all of them," came the slightly impatient reply. Noticed the man's confused look, she inquired "how many can there be, anyway?"

After glancing at his monitor, he replied "twelve thousand, one hundred and sixty-three." Janeway held her head in her hand. That was nearly triple the number on board already, even with the slowing down of things after all food conducive to tribble mating had been eliminated. "I believe an appropriate Earth saying at this time would be caveat emptor."

"Yes, quite. All right, we made a deal, let's do it," spoke Janeway

resignedly. No use giving the Federation a bad name in these parts, she told herself. We're close enough that if the technology is good enough, we may be reaching out here well within our lifetimes. If we don't get mobbed by tribbles first.

"Say," Neelix reported in the ship's mess hall, as if spreading gossip to the ensigns who were getting their food, "I hear Lieutenant Torres had to move her quarters to Engineering."

Tom, behind them in line, spoke up. "What we'd like to know is, how are you managing to hold up?"

"Yeah, I'm surprised you haven't tried to cook one by now," Chakotay teased him.

"B'Elanna would." They walked over to sit with Janeway and Seven, who had several tribbles beside their trays.

Neelix, finished serving the food, wiped his hands, took off his apron, and walked over to the other crewmembers. "Say, I've got a great idea."

"On what, how to get rid of the tribbles?"

"No, Captain, to build morale. You see, we have each tribble numbered as it's born. Each crewmember grabs as many as they can, on the condition they have to keep them in their quarters. We have little prizes for every 500th and thousandth one." The others began shaking their heads. "Then, since we'll hit the 20,000th tribble in a few days, whoever gets that one gets something really special - like maybe a shuttle named after them."

Paris couldn't help but laugh. "I gotta hand it to you, Neelix, that's one funny idea."

"Hey, don't you think it'll help boost morale, though?"

Grinning broadly, Janeway remarked "we've slowed their growth rate down, but there are so many to begin with, it's beyond belief. If we had a hundred, maybe I'd take you up on the offer." Though at least you boost our morale with your humor sometimes, she admitted silently.

"Well, just thought I'd mention it." He looked around at the tables. "Though it seems you all have tribbles laying around anyway." He walked off.

"If only we could tell which gender was which," noted the captain, asking how the holodecks were functioning with the tribbles.

"They have turned into great curiosities to the people of Ireland in Captain Janeway's personal favorite," noted Seven.

"That's probably better than a place suited solely for the tribbles - maybe they won't mate so fast," came the first officer.

Seven responded that they were not multiplying quite as fast. "However, their number continues to grow. And, the space inside the holodeck is not infinite. They will run out of space eventually, leaving the shuttles as the only viable place to put them out of

everyone's way."

"And after that..." Tom trailed off, not wanting to think of the possibilities.

"It would be wise," concluded Seven, "if we redouble our efforts to search for a home for these creatures. Although I am intrigued by my study of them, it is not efficient to have them around a ship like ours."

Tom smiled. "But you're still having fun with them."

Seven, finished with her meal, attempted to push her chair out. She pushed aside five tribbles which were on the floor, then carried her tray over to Neelix, where she had to push aside half a dozen more to set it down. Turning back to the others, she replied "I do not consider this to be fun."

"Now achieving standard orbit around the Lovulian homeworld," announced Chakotay into the command chair's intercom. Janeway entered from her ready room and assumed the conn. "Think this looks like a good place to deposit our tribbles?"

"We'll see," was all Janeway would say.

"Captain," reported Tuvok, "my scans indicate a severe lack of activity on the surface of that planet. It appears that whoever lives there has not achieved much in the last few months."

Chakotay offered one possibility. "Maybe we were sent on a wild goose chase. Like when Indian tribes would tell settlers there was an even wealthier tribe just over the next hill."

The captain admitted that was possible. "Especially if they figured it was an easy way to get rid of their tribbles. However, to be on the safe side, before we just dump them let's make sure there is something down there suitable, and that there really isn't a species that can help us but that's really shy. Chakotay, I'm sending you and Ensign Kim down. Make sure you materialize in a remote place and in customary clothing, just in case they are primitive." Now that we have all of our tribbles fairly well organized, at least for now B'Elanna doesn't have to beam down to get away from the specter of tribble invasion, she thought to herself.

Chakotay and Kim beamed down dressed as Lovulian natives. After walking several hundred meters, they discovered a large building. Peeking inside, they noticed that the inhabitants of the building were unconscious, and bore orange stripes. "This doesn't look normal," spoke Kim.

"I'll say." They scanned the bodies with their tricorders. "It appears they have some sort of tissue contamination. We'd better get out of here, just in case." He tapped his communicator pin. "Chakotay to Voyager. Think you could spare the Doctor - we seem to have a medical problem on our hands."

Several moments later, the holodoc beamed down. "Not more tribbles, I hope," he remarked.

"No, but look in that building." The holodoc did so, and emerged



quickly. Chakotay asked what he thought. "Might explain why so little activity."

"I'm studying the scans, Commander, I might be able to make an antidote for them, but it'll take a couple says."

"We don't have that long, do we," Kim inquired.

"Our tribble population is under control," considered the commander, but if they do have something which could help us, it would be nice to get it and get out. We can always leave a copy of your program."

"That's true." They beamed back with their findings, and reported to the briefing room. "It is my opinion that a duplicate of me can be of assistance."

"Do you know what having a hologram like you would do to a primitive society, though," Janeway wondered aloud.

Tuvok explained that "our further scans have shown some sophisticated systems which may be primitive warp cores."

"Even if they are not," spoke Seven as she looked away from the tribble she was studying, "this easily fits the realm of an emergency."

"Granted. Okay, I'll beam down with the doctor and Tuvok, and we'll make contact with a region with healthy people in it."

Chakotay acknowledged the captain, then spoke to Seven. "You're studying those more and more."

"It is a lot more pleasant when they are neatly ordered, as we have done so now," came the ex-Borg.

"We won't be able to keep them under control for long, with those numbers they'll outgrow our habitats' fast," spoke Tom.

Janeway smiled at her. "I'm afraid you're going to have to get used to it for a while, I'm not beaming these creatures down where there's a plague." She hoped that perhaps they would find some assistance where they materialized, but their tribble overload and a few other mild disappointments had kept the crew from focusing on the possibility of getting home.

Janeway, Tuvok, and the doctor transported into what looked like the lobby of a large government building. "My estimates are," the Vulcan stated, "that this houses some sort of planetary governmental body. What, we don't know."

Just then, a man in a light green outfit which could be mistaken for a child's sleeper, but which was apparently a uniform, entered. Janeway introduced themselves, and explained who sent them. "Oh, thank goodness, we have been fighting the worst plague in our world's history," remarked the man. "We have been unable to keep communication open - in fact, we have greatly discouraged anyone from coming here, because we are so afraid of infecting anyone else."

"I am sure we can discover an antidote - I have inoculated these two

against the virus or what have you," the doctor spoke.

"And not yourself?"

"I am actually a hologram - thanks to some new technology, however, I can be transported. I can also be duplicated if you need," he explained.

"We had some information to give you from your friends," Janeway told him, "and we heard you may have some items which could help us get back home quickly."

"As a matter of fact, we do - we use a technology which allows us to create and aim wormholes for small ships." He gave the size requirements - it seemed Voyager would just fit, though it would require lots of energy.

The group remained on the planet for about half an hour, as a couple copies of the doctor were beamed down and information was given regarding the technology to get Voyager home. However, Janeway had little time to celebrate, as Tom Paris contacted her and said "Captain, we have an emergency up here."

"Why, what's happened?"

Paris spoke from Sickbay. He'd just finished analyzing several tribbles. "Captain, whatever Chakotay and Kim brought back with them we humans aren't affected, but we can sure be carriers. The tribbles have it."

"It's not killing them, is it?"

"Worse, they're breeding faster than ever! Instead of five to eight now it's normal for each to have fifteen or so! It's just started, but already I know if something isn't done fast, we're going to be overrun!" The others agreed to quickly beam up, and Paris closed the channel just as Torres entered. "Not now, B'Elanna, I'm busy..."

The half-Klingon didn't care. "They're getting into engineering now!" She grabbed him by the collar. "I demand you put me into a coma until we get rid of these things!"

Tom sighed and injected her with something as he said "I don't know what will do that, but here's a sedative." She quickly collapsed as the doctor came into Sickbay. "It's all yours."

Meanwhile, on the bridge, Janeway heard that it would be about thirty minutes before the machine was installed. They would be the longest thirty minutes of her life.

On a space station orbiting Earth, Reginald Barclay paced to get rid of nervous energy, then looked back into his sensors. "They're almost here - they must have opened up that wormhole that just appeared."

"Excellent," proclaimed the admiral. He ordered Barclay to record everything that occurred, they didn't want to miss a thing. "This will be a moment for all of Starfleet to remember," he replied dreamily.

"Coming into audio range, Sir," spoke an ensign as Mr. Wildman, Naomi's dad, ran excitedly onto the bridge from the turbolift.

"I imagine they will be so excited they won't know what to say," spoke Counselor Deanna Troi.

"Indeed," spoke the enthused admiral Hayes. "Open hailing frequencies. Captain Janeway?"

Janeway's voice was heard amidst a deafening racket of purring, the sound akin to the chatter of millions of locusts. "Oh, goodness, Tuvok, how close are we...oh, hello, Admiral?...where is my comm link? Can anyone hear me?"

"Captain Janeway?" Admiral Hayes spoke inquisitively as Barclay paced once more. "Is something the matter? We hear you loud and clear, along with..." A faint "good" was heard.

The ensign spoke an explanation from his chair. "Sir, I'm picking up..." He paused and glared at the number momentarily. "...Seven hundred sixteen thousand one hundred fifty-three tribbles on board Voyager."

Everyone's mouths stood agape as Voyager's bridge appeared on the main viewscreen - a three-foot tribble pile lined Janeway's chair, with several sneaking onto her chair once in a while. The rest of the bridge had similar piles near them, akin to snowdrifts. A path in the several inches of creatures which covered the bridge had been cleared between different bridge stations, but it was slowly being overrun with crawling tribbles, which Naomi was clearing before she turned around to face the viewscreen. "What on Earth..." proclaimed the admiral.

A wide-eyed Barclay finally found his voice. "Th-th-th-that's...a lot of tribbles."

"Tom," came Janeway's voice, "let us know the minute we're in transporter range, so we can get out of here." As if she suddenly realized they were near Earth, the captain faced the screen.

"Welcome home," came the admiral, unsure what else to say.

The worn out captain explained. "Three weeks ago, all this was one tribble that Naomi got."

Eyes downcast, Naomi explained "I didn't know it was pregnant."

Janeway spoke again. "Some other circumstances have made this a very rapid multiplication; not as fast now as a few days ago, we put something in their food so we could get all the tribbles inoculated against this disease, but our air supply is taxed to the rim. We haven't had any time to celebrate, but request permission to beam down RIGHT NOW!"

"Permission granted. And...we're anxious to talk more about all your findings," the admiral remarked.

As the link was broken, Mr. Wildman muttered to Troi "if my daughter ever wants a pet again, I think it's going to be a goldfish."

Naomi felt quite awkward dining with her mother and newly introduced Ktarian father. Incredibly worried on the starbase as they dined, she was unsure what strange, new things might be about to happen. She certainly hoped she wouldn't be forced to leave everything she knew.

Desiring some familiar company, she motioned Seven of Nine over to their table. She carried her tray over and greeted everyone, noting that there were two tribbles on the table. "The station is still experiencing some problems with all of these tribbles, I take it," noted the ex-Borg. She, too, felt uncomfortable in this unusual environment, though after a couple days the odd looks had ceased as Federation people felt more comfortable with her.

"Yes," remarked Mrs. Wildman, "although in a few days a large transport will be coming to take all the rest to a tribble colony."

Still finding it hard to get over the presence of his family - after thinking them lost for so long - Mr. Wildman noted "I've been thinking about settling down to one of those tribble ranches or something like that myself. Be a good way for you to learn how to raise them right," he said to Naomi. "If you wouldn't mind, of course," he spoke to his wife. "At least right now, I'm leery of space travel of any kind where we're not together, afraid of losing you again."

"A tribble ranch," came Naomi's exclamation. "Gee, can we? Please? I'd love to go into space, but...right now it's just so confusing, thinking of a planet as my home. They'd have space stations there, at least, wouldn't they?"

"Yes, they would. We'd have to get licensed by the Federation Humane Society, but I think we can learn quickly how to raise them. Having tribbles around is very soothing," Mrs. Wildman agreed. Sensing their guest's discomfort, she tried to demonstrate that she understood Seven's plight. "I imagine being Borg-ified for so long, a home planet will seem quite strange to you, too."

"Yes, quite," she chose to admit, unsure of what else to say. The lack of certainty as to what would happen next, and as to her own feelings, proved very troubling for the normally efficient Seven of Nine.

"You're welcome to join us," spoke Mr. Wildman.

"Yeah, you'd have a great time, and I've heard tribbles are really great to take care of, when you know how," expounded Naomi, anxious to have her friend with them.

Seven smiled slightly, picking up a tribble. She stroked it gently, allowing herself to enjoy the soft feeling. Examining it without her analytical side, and without the recent frustrations of being overrun by them, she found it quite pleasant. The notion of raising such creatures appealed to her, though it was hard for her to communicate why. It purred happily as she continued to pet it gently. "I might just do that."

THE END - unless someone wants to do a story on how a tribble ranch  
functions :-)

End  
file.